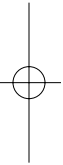
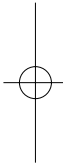




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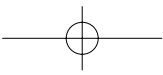


A cool breeze gusted between the mighty mountain peaks, hauling in heavier rain clouds. The rain drummed on the fuselage of the aircraft lying on the edge of a broad plateau. Over the years, vegetation had clung to the plane, camouflaging it from prying eyes. One wing had been torn off against the mountain, the other stretched over the cliff. Ordinarily the cliff top offered an unparalleled view across a lake, but today it was smothered in cloud.

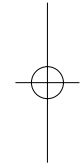



Several gorillas sheltered by broad tree trunks and leafy canopies around the plane. They watched the weather cleanse the mountain as they waited patiently for the storm to pass.

Tarzan, however, shifted restlessly as he waited for the rain to stop. A large hole in the fuselage formed an artificial cave. It was there he took refuge, and without the long, thick fur the gorillas possessed, he shivered. A young ape rolled carefree at his feet.





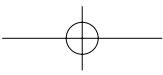
Karnath, orphaned by the rebel Tafari, now kept as close to Tarzan as possible, even though a kindly female gorilla had adopted him as her own. Karnath jumped as lightning flickered across the sky. Tarzan gave a series of throaty grunts to assure him everything was OK and the gorilla continued playing, bouncing across the ageing aircraft seats, even when the thunder shook the mountain.



Tarzan envied Karnath. He wished he could just ignore the problems of his *mangani* family. Not only were they grieving for their lost family members after Tafari's attack, but they were also dangerously low on food. The *mangani* had spent too long in the immediate area. Now choice shoots and bark were at a premium. Tarzan knew they must move on to allow the jungle to heal. His family usually migrated in a circular path around the mountain, always returning to this home, and a welcome feast, months later.

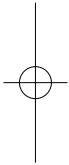
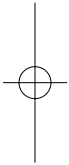
But outside pressures had Tarzan on edge. While he feared no living creature himself, he feared what others would do to his family. To avoid areas Tafari's men had tainted and the swathes of jungle the loggers had destroyed, Tarzan would have to lead them to places he had only explored long ago, as a child. And he was not entirely certain what he would now find there.

Thinking about the loggers brought Jane to mind. Tarzan felt comfortable in her company. He enjoyed



learning and she had taught him many new things about the world around him. It had been good to have somebody to talk to after many years. The last human contact he'd had was with a French United Nations officer called D'Arnot, whom he had found wounded in the jungle.



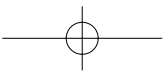
The officer had taught Tarzan to speak English and educated him on the dangers from the outside world that threatened his way of life. A firm friendship grew, but D'Arnot was curious to discover where Tarzan came from, so he left one day hoping to find answers and solemnly promised to return. After many months, Tarzan found D'Arnot's corpse, half eaten by the jungle. His friend had tried to honour his promise, but it had cost him his life.



Tarzan hoped a similar fate didn't await Jane. The jungle was a wild and unpredictable place, for anyone.

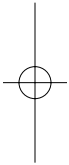
A coarse bark echoed across the plateau. It was Kerchak, the biggest silverback in the tribe. He walked past Tarzan with an arrogant swagger. The silverback would have been leader of the *mangani* if it weren't for Tarzan, and whenever he went off exploring he left the elderly silverback in charge. But every so often, Kerchak would test Tarzan, checking he was still fit to be leader.

Tarzan maintained steely eye contact with the gorilla. It was a sure sign of aggression. Kerchak

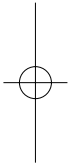


roared, baring his huge incisors – each one as long as Tarzan’s fingers. The circular scar on Tarzan’s shoulder burned as he remembered the fight with Kerchak that had eventually won him dominance, almost at the cost of losing his arm. The great ape ripped up a sod of earth and flung it at Tarzan.

Tarzan didn’t react. He just growled in retaliation. Without turning around, he knew Karnath had stopped playing and was cowering at the back of the aircraft hoping there wouldn’t be a fight.

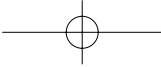


Kerchak thought he sensed weakness and took a loping step towards Tarzan. The pair had played such games many times before, but Tarzan was not in the mood today. With the terrible roar of a bull male, he sprang at Kerchak. The gorilla didn’t see Tarzan’s leg deliver the sweeping kick that knocked his mighty arms aside and suddenly he found himself falling forwards. The next second Tarzan was crouching on Kerchak’s back, rubbing the same clod of muddy earth into the gorilla’s face.



Tarzan laughed as Kerchak blinked mud from his eyes, then he flipped from the ape’s back and landed on top of the aircraft’s fuselage, where he beat his chest and roared to the storm clouds. A clap of thunder carried Tarzan’s cry across the mountain.

The other gorillas that had been watching the half-hearted challenge hooted as Kerchak loped away to

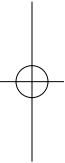


clean himself, casting a venomous glance at Tarzan as he did so.

Tarzan felt no malice towards Kerchak. It was just the old silverback's way of reminding him that they needed to move on and, if Tarzan wasn't going to lead them, he would.

With a sigh, Tarzan watched as Karnath snatched at raindrops falling past the cave entrance. The young ape was one friend he could rely on.

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'I want to go to Sango,' Jane said to Robbie. She had waited until they were alone in a quiet corner of the bar. The loggers had slowly dispersed after a hard day's graft. Clark and Archie sat at a table, eating and talking together. Robbie and Mister David, the camp's unofficial foreman, had been playing cards until Robbie quit the game after losing too much money to the grinning Congolese man.

'I won't be going for another five days,' Robbie replied. He knew Jane was keen to go to town, but he'd slipped away on supply runs when she wasn't paying attention because he was under strict orders from Archie not to let her leave the camp.

'What's stopping us going tomorrow?'

'I have to work.'

'Messing around with the jeep's engine, that's not

. . .' She bit her lip. She wanted Robbie's help so it was wise not to annoy him. 'I'm sure you won't be missed.'

'Maybe not, but I'm sure your dad would miss you.' Robbie felt sorry for her. He could see she was getting frustrated within the confines of the camp. It would drive him crazy too. 'Look, ask Archie about coming with me next time. We've got the sat phones, maybe he'll be OK if you just ask.'


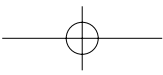
Jane looked over at her dad. After everything they'd been through together in the jungle it was difficult to be angry with him, but she still resented him limiting her movements. 'Yeah, right!' she scoffed. 'He wants to keep me here like a caged animal!'

Robbie stood up, eager not to start an argument.

'That's because he cares. And after last time . . .' Everybody had been worried when Jane went missing. He wanted to remind her that *he* had also risked his life searching for her. He wanted to point out that she was lucky to have somebody who looked out for her. Instead, he swallowed his irritation. 'Look, if you want to get out of here we could go for a little exploration. Maybe go and find Tarzan.' He was fishing for any lead from Jane that would take them to the crashed aircraft.

'I don't think he wants to be found.'

'Who knows what somebody like him wants?'



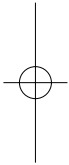
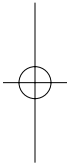
Jane opened her mouth to speak, but before she could tell him just how *smart* the feral boy was, Robbie added, 'We should go see him. Check if he's all right. Head up to that plane you say he lives in.'

'So you're saying you're free to wander into the jungle, but not to drive me to town?'

'I'm saying . . .' Robbie trailed off. She was on guard already and any further conversation would just inflame her suspicions. Instead he feigned hurt. 'I was just trying to help, but I guess you don't need it. Goodnight.'

He headed off without looking back.

★



Jane glowered in the corner. Robbie was obviously trying to keep her away from the town, but why was he so keen on exploring the jungle with her? He'd never had any interest in doing so before. She wondered what had triggered this change in attitude but decided that she was going to go to Sango regardless of what anybody else said. She was a free spirit. She smiled to herself – at times like this she wondered just how much of Tarzan's wild behaviour had rubbed off on her.